



State of Connecticut

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Testimony in Support of HB 5096 *An Act Increasing The Threshold Required For Passage Of Unfunded Mandates.*

February 4, 2015

By Senator Paul Formica

Senator Osten, Representative Miller, Representative Aman, Senator Linares and other distinguished members of the Planning and Development Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in favor of HB 5096, *An Act Increasing The Threshold Required For Passage Of Unfunded Mandates.*

The passage of unfunded mandates by the General Assembly continues to burden the financial difficulties faced by Connecticut's municipalities. According to the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities (CCM), there are currently 1200 mandates, most of which are unfunded. This is a tremendous strain for towns already trying to deal with severe budget problems. Faced with ever rising costs, many of these towns are forced to raise their property taxes, or to cut back on services to the detriment of their residents. I know – I was the former First Selectman of East Lyme and it is not easy to try and pay for the needs of residents while state government keeps changing the goal post. It is a vicious and costly cycle.

Mandates such as the Minimum Budget Requirement and the prevailing wage mandate to name only a few are tough to meet. Oftentimes these mandates impose a one size fits all solution that does not work equally well for all towns and which produces unintended consequences.

HB 5096 would require two-thirds majority vote in both chambers for the passage of new or expanded unfunded mandates.

At a recent legislative forum for the Connecticut Council for Small Towns (COST) the leaders of the general assembly were asked about a majority vote to pass new or expanded mandates that are not funded by the state.

It was said that every bill gets assessed by nonpartisan staff to determine if it is an unfunded mandate. "These bills don't go anywhere." I would argue that is not true. Take for instance the cost of education on a town. If a town has dwindling enrollment, why should they have to spend more money to reach the minimum budget requirement (MBR)? Wouldn't it make more sense to be flexible and allow towns to reduce spending at their own rate? This in turn will save taxpayers money as enrollment declines. There is also the recent cost of the new teacher evaluation mandate attached to the Education Reform pushed on municipalities. The

paperwork and extra cost to administration is outrageous. It takes too much time and money away from the classroom and the children. Our education efforts should be focused on the students not government bureaucracy.

With the state asking so much of its towns as already, we should not add to that burden without the most careful consideration. I urge the Planning and Development Committee to support HB 5096 and thank all the members for their attention.